

Collective Imaginaries

by Lizette Guerra



June L. Mazer (right) and Bunny MacCulloch. All rights reserved UCLA Center for the Study of Women

Yolanda Retter-Vargas, my mentor and predecessor at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, taught me that even within my own perceived community there were many communities: Latinas, Chicanas, Lesbianas, feminists, and others. She drilled into my work ethic the notion that I could not truly be at the service of my community, or any community for that matter, if I did not make a true concerted effort to represent everyone, women, men, lesbian, gay, rich and poor, of all cultural backgrounds and beliefs. Yet, historically, this belief has not been central to our profession. Archivists have been privileged with the power to decide what is deemed historical and what is not. What do we preserve for future generations and what do we leave out of our collective imaginaries?

Despite the reality that Los Angeles is one of the most diverse cities in the world, people of color and the LGBT community in particular continue to be underrepresented and in effect invisible within archival collections, the public record, and historical research. The partnership between

the UCLA Library, CSW, and the Mazer Archives reflects an increasing awareness amongst archivists and librarians about the importance of collecting more ethnic studies and LGBT materials. In recent years, our profession has been moving away from exclusionary collecting practices and progressing toward more community-oriented approaches that include donors and patrons in the archival process. The collections in the Mazer Archives project not only reflect this nation's rich history, but also, more importantly, provide communities who have long been under-served and under-documented within the historical record with a resource that respectfully reflects their experiences and contributions to U.S. history. Each step of the way, we have made it our priority to include the Mazer Archives' staff and affiliates in the archival process. We have chosen to do so because each of the stories contained within the collections represents a community's memories. The presence of such materials within an institution such as UCLA contributes to a community's visibility, legitimation, and continuity.

"If we don't collect these things," Yolanda always said, "no one else will." The partnership between UCLA and the Mazer Archives is a perfect example of the type of innovative project that Yolanda would have supported. This partnership has allowed us to document and provide wide access to documentation of early lesbian activist and literary history in Los Angeles since the 1930s—stories that might otherwise have been lost or forgotten. As Yolanda wrote in her dissertation, *On the Side of Angels: Lesbian Activism in Los Angeles, 1970-1990* (University of New Mexico, 1999), "Amid the criticisms, let it be remembered that once there was a vibrant movement that put women first. In a world that was (is still) bent on undermining women, that kind of prioritizing and commitment deserves respect and study. Regardless of what terms are used to describe (or disparage) the lesbian activist movement, its spirit persists within the generational cohort that created it during a 'social moment' in U.S. history. It persists as a vision, an ideology, a submerged network and as a significant contribution to the tradition of resistant consciousness and pro-woman advocacy. Blessed Be."



Yolanda Retter-Vargas (left) with Barbara Gittings, UCLA, 2006.
Photo by Angela Brinkele. Angela Brinkele Papers

*Yolanda Retter-Vargas (left) with Barbara Gittings, UCLA, 2006.
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This essay is reprinted with permission from June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives: Making Invisible Histories Visible: A Resource Guide to the Collections. Edited by Kathleen A. McHugh, Brenda Johnson-Grau, and Ben Raphael Sher. Los Angeles: UCLA Center for the Study of Women, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-615-99084-2.

Appendices

Herstory Archives

<http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/>

June Mazer Lesbian Archive

<http://www.mazerlesbianarchives.org/>

In the June Mazer Archive, the following are Latina collections:

Terri de la Pena Papers

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8sx6f0m/>

Terri de la Peña is a novelist, short story writer, and children's book author whose writings deal with complex issues of identity, homophobia, assimilation and resistance focusing on the lives of Chicana lesbians. This collection contains materials related to the creation, dissemination, publication and revision of both fictional and nonfictional works by Terri de la Peña. The bulk of the collection is made up of drafts of her first novel, *Margins*, also considered to be the first lesbian Chicana novel. The collection includes correspondence, contractual information, promotional materials, drafts and notes.

Connexus /Centro de Mujeres Collection

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt1779r55b/>

The Connexus/Centro de Mujeres Collection contains the administrative records of Connexus / Centro de Mujeres, one of the first Los Angeles non-profit organizations that catered and provided services to lesbians.

Lizette Guerra is the archivist and librarian at the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Library and Archive. She received an MA in Latin American Studies and an M.L.I.S. in Information Studies from UCLA in 2007. She has research experience working in museums both in Mexico and Guatemala. She has done archival, curatorial, and cataloging work for the Autry National Center's Southwest Museum of the American Indian and the Museum of the American West in Los Angeles, CA.

This entry was posted in Archival Work, Chicana and Chicano Studies, Gender and Sexuality on September 9, 2014 [<http://library.osu.edu/blogs/mujerestalk/2014/09/09/collective-imaginaries/>] by [mujerestalk](#).
